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F A Z I O,

Ed. Beaumont

A TRAGEDY.

BY

H. H. MILMAN, B. A.

FELLOW OF BRASEN NOSE COLLEGE.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THE following attempt at reviving our old national drama with greater simplicity of plot, was written with some view to the stage. Circumstances and an opinion of considerable weight induced me to prefer the less perilous ordeal of the press : as in the one case, if its merits are small or moderate, the quiet sleep of oblivion will be infinitely less grating to an author's feelings, than a noisy and tumultuous execution in a public Theatre ; if, on the other hand, public opinion be in its favour, its subsequent appearance on the stage would be at least under favourable auspices. I am aware, that there is a prejudice at the Theatre against plays which have first appeared in print ; but whence it originates I am at a loss to conceive. It being im-

possible, on the present scale of our Theatres, for more than a certain proportion of those present to see or hear sufficiently distinctly to form a judgment on a drama, which is independent of show and hurry; it surely would be an advantage that a previous familiarity with the language and incidents should enable the audience to catch those lighter and fainter touches of character, of passion, and of poetry, on which dramatic excellence so mainly depends. I put entirely out of the question those who go to a play from mere desire of novelty, whose opinions either way would be of very slight value.

The Play is founded on a story, which was quoted in the Annual Register for 1795, from the "Varieties of Literature;" but great liberties have been taken with it.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

DUKE OF FLORENCE.

GONSALVO, }
AURIO, } *Senators of Florence.*

GIRALDI FAZIO.

BARTOLO.

PHILARIO.

FALSETTO.

DANDOLO.

THEODORE, }
ANTONIO, } *Captains of the Guard.*

PIERO.

MARCHESA ALDABELLA.

BIANCA.

CLARA.

FAZIO.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*A Room with Crucibles and Apparatus of Alchymy.*

Enter FAZIO and BIANCA.

FAZIO.

WHY what a peevish envious fabulist
Was he, that vow'd cold wedlock's atmosphere
Wearies the thin and dainty plumes of love;
That a fond husband's holy appetite,
Like the gross surfeit of intemperate joy,
Grows sickly and fastidious at the sweets
Of its own chosen flower !—My own Bianca,
With what delicious scorn we laugh away
Such sorry satire !

BIANCA.

Which of thy smooth looks
Teacheth this harmony of bland deceit?
Oh, my own Fazio! if a serpent told me
That it was stingless in a tone like thine,
I should believe it. Oh, thou sweetly false!
That at cold midnight quitt'st my side to pore
O'er musty tomes, dark sign'd and character'd,
O'er boiling skellets, crucibles and stills,
Drugs and elixirs.

FAZIO.

Aye, chide on, my love;
The nightingale's complaining is more sweet,
Than half the dull unvarying birds that pipe
Perpetual amorous joy.—Tell me, Bianca,
How long is't since we wedded?

BIANCA.

Would'st thou know
Thy right and title to thy weariness?—
Beyond two years.

FAZIO.

Days, days, Bianca! Love
Hath in its calendar no tedious time,

So long as what cold lifeless souls call years.
Oh, with my books, my sage philosophy,
My infants, and their mother, time slides on
So smoothly, as 'twere fall'n asleep, forgetting
Its heaven-ordained motion. We are poor;
But in the wealth of love, in that, Bianca,
In that we are eastern sultans. I have thought,
If that my wondrous alchymy should win
That precious liquor, whose transmuting dew
Makes the black iron start forth brilliant gold,
Were it not wise to cast it back again
Into its native darkness?

BIANCA.

Out upon it!—

Oh, leave it there, my Fazio!—Leave it there!—
I hate it!—'Tis my rival, 'tis thy mistress.—
Aye, this it is that makes thee strange and restless,
A truant to thine own Bianca's arms,
This wondrous secret.

FAZIO.

Dost thou know, Bianca,
Our neighbour, old Bartolo?

BIANCA.

O yes, yes—

That yellow wretch, that looks as he were stain'd
With watching his own gold ; every one knows him
Enough to loathe him. Not a friend hath he,
Nor kindred nor familiar ; not a slave,
Not a lean serving wench : nothing e'er enter'd
But his spare self within his jealous doors,
Except a wand'ring rat ; and that, they say,
Was famine-struck, and died there.—What of him ?

FAZIO.

Yet he, Bianca, he is of our rich ones.
There's not a galliot on the sea, but bears
A venture of Bartolo's ; not an acre,
Nay, not a villa of our proudest princes,
But he hath cramp'd it with a mortgage ; he,
He only stocks our prisons with his debtors.
I saw him creeping home last night ; he shudder'd
As he unlock'd his door, and look'd around,
As if he thought that every breath of wind
Were some keen thief ; and when he lock'd him in,
I heard the grating key turn twenty times,
To try if all were safe. I look'd again

From our high window by mere chance, and saw
The motion of his scanty moping lantern ;
And, where his wind-rent lattice was ill stuff'd
With tatter'd remnants of a money-bag,
Through cobwebs and thick dust I spied his face,
Like some dry wither-boned anatomy,
Through a huge chestlid, jealously and scantily
Uplifted, peering upon coin and jewels,
Ingots and wedges, and broad bars of gold,
Upon whose lustre the wan light shone muddily,
As though the New World had outrun the Spaniard,
And emptied all its mines in that coarse hovel.
His ferret eyes gloated as wanton o'er them,
As a gross Satyr on a naked Nymph ;
And then, as he heard something like a sound,
He clapp'd the lid to, and blew out the lantern.
But I, Bianca, hurried to thy arms,
And thank'd my God that I had braver riches.

BIANCA.

Oh then, let that black furnace burst : dash down
Those ugly and mishapen jars and vials.
Nay, nay, most sage philosopher, to night,
At least to night, be only thy Bianca's. [*She clings to him.*]

FAZIO. (*Looking fondly at her.*)

Why e'en the Prince of Bards was false and slanderous,
Who girt Jove's bride in that voluptuous zone,
Ere she could win her weary lord to love ;
While my earth-born Bianca bears by nature
An ever-blooming cæstus of delight !

BIANCA.

So courtly and so fanciful, my Fazio !
Which of our dukes hath lent thee his cast poesies ?
Why, such a musical and learned phrase
Had soften'd the marchesa, Aldabella,
That high signora, that once pamper'd thee
Almost to madness with her rosy smiles ;
And then my lady queen put on her winter,
And froze thee till thou wert a very icicle,
Had not the lowly and despised Bianca
Ta'en pity on't, and thaw'd it in her arms.

FAZIO.

Nay, taunt not her, Bianca, taunt not her !
Thy Fazio loved her once. Who, who would blame
Heaven's moon, because a maniac hath adored it,
And died in his dotage ? E'en a saint might wear
Proud Aldabella's scorn, nor look less heavenly.

Oh, it dropt balm upon the wounds it gave,
The soul was pleased to be so sweetly wrong'd,
And misery grew rapturous. Aldabella!
The gracious! the melodious! Oh, the words
Laugh'd on her lips; the motion of her smiles
Shower'd beauty, as the air-caressed spray
The dews of morning; and her stately steps
Were light as though a winged angel trod
Over earth's flowers, and fear'd to brush away
Their delicate hues; aye, e'en her very robes
Were animate and breathing, as they felt
The presence of her loveliness, spread around
Their thin and gauzy clouds, ministering freely
Officious duty on the shrine where Nature
Hath lavish'd all her skill.

BIANCA.

A proud loose wanton!

FAZIO.

She wanton!—Aldabella loose!—Then, then
Are the pure lilies black as soot within,
The stainless virgin snow is hot and rancid,
And chastity——aye, it may be in heaven,
But all beneath the moon is wild and haggard.

If she be spotted, oh, unholiness
Hath never been so delicately lodged
Since that bad devil walk'd fair Paradise.

BIANCA.

Already silent? Hath your idol quaff'd
Enough of your soft incense? Fazio! Fazio!
But that her gaudy bark would aye disdain
The quiet stream whereon we glide so smooth,
I should be fearful of ye.

FAZIO.

Nay, unjust!

Ungenerous Bianca! who foregoes,
For the gay revel of a golden harp,
Its ecstasies and rich enchanting falls,
His own domestic lute's familiar pleasing?
But thou, thou vain and wanton in thy power,
'Thou know'st canst make e'en jealousy look lovely,
And all thy punishment for that bad passion
Be this—[*kisses her*]*—*Good night!—I will but snatch a look
How the great crucible doth its slow work,
And be with thee; unless thou fanciest, sweet,
That Aldabella lurks behind the furnace;
And then, heaven knows how long I may be truant.

[*Exit* BIANCA.]

FAZIO (*solus.*)

Oh, what a star of the first magnitude
Were poor young Fazio, if his skill should work
The wondrous secret your deep-closetted sages
Grow grey in dreaming of! Why all our Florence
Would be too narrow for his branching glories;
It would o'erleap the Alps, and all the north
Troop here to see the great philosopher.
He would be wealthy too—wealthy in fame;
And that's more golden than the richest gold.

[*A groan without.*

Holy St. Francis! what a groan was there!

Voice without.

Within there!—Oh! within there, neighbour!—Death,
Murder, and merciless robbery!

FAZIO *opens the Door.*

What! Bartolo!

BARTOLO.

Thank ye, my friend! Ha! ha! ha! my old limbs!
I did not think them half so tough and sinewy.
St. Dominic! but their pins prick'd close and keen.
Six of 'em, strong and sturdy, with their daggers,
Tickling the old man to let loose his ducats.

FAZIO.

Who, neighbour, who?

BARTOLO.

Robbers, black crape-faced robbers,
Your only blood-suckers, that drain your veins,
And yet their meagre bodies aye grow sparer.
They knew that I had monies from the Duke,
But I o'erreach'd them, neighbour: not a ducat,
Nay, not a doit, to cross themselves withal,
Got they from old Bartolo.—Oh, I bleed!
And my old heart beats minutes like a clock.

FAZIO.

A surgeon, friend!

BARTOLO.

Aye, one of your kind butchers,
Who cut and slash your flesh for their own pastime,
And then, God bless the mark! they must have money!
Gold, gold, or nothing! Silver is grown coarse,
And rings unhandsomely. Have I scaped robbing,
Only to give?—Oh there! there! there! Cold, cold,
Cold as December.

FAZIO.

Nay, then, a confessor!

BARTOLO.

A confessor ! one of your black smooth talkers,
That drone the name of God incessantly,
Like the drear burthen of a doleful ballad !
That sing to one of bounteous codicils
To the Franciscans or some hospital !
Oh ! there's a shooting !—Oozing here !—Aye me !
My ducats and my ingots scarcely cold
From the hot Indies !—Oh ! and I forgot
To seal those jewels from the Milan Duke !
Oh ! misery, misery !—Just this very day,
And that mad spendthrift Angelo hath not sign'd
The mortgage on those meadows by the Arno.
Oh ! misery, misery !—Yet I scaped them bravely,
And brought my ducats off !——

[Dies.

FAZIO.

Why e'en lie there, as foul a mass of earth
As ever loaded it. 'Twere sin to charity
To wring one drop of brine upon thy corpse.
In sooth, Death's not nice-stomach'd, to be cramm'd
With such unsavoury offal. What a God
'Mong men might this dead wither'd thing have been,
That now must rot beneath the earth, as once

He rotted on it ! Why his wealth had won
In better hands an atmosphere around him,
Musical ever with the voice of blessing,
Nations around his tomb, like marble mourners,
Vied for their pedestals.—In better hands ?
Methinks these fingers are nor coarse nor clumsy.
Philosophy ! Philosophy ! thou'rt lame
And tortoise-paced to my fleet desires !
I scent a shorter path to fame and riches.
The Hesperian trees nod their rich clusters at me,
Tickling my timorous and withdrawing grasp ;—
I would, yet dare not :—that's a coward's reckoning.
Half of the sin lies in " I would." To-morrow,
If that it find me poor, will write me fool,
And myself be a mock unto myself.
Aye, and the body murder'd in my house !
Your carrion breeds most strange and loathsome insects—
Suspicion's of the quickest and the keenest—
So, neighbour, by your leave, your keys ! In sooth,
Thou hadst no desperate love for holy church ;
Long-knolled bell were no sweet music to thee.
A " God be with thee " shall be all thy mass ;
Thou never lovedst those dry and droning priests.

Thou'lt rot most cool and quiet in my garden ;
Your gay and gilded vault would be too costly.

[Exit with the body of Bartolo.]

SCENE II.—*A Street.*

Enter FAZIO with a dark Lantern.

I, wont to rove like a tame household dog,
Caress'd by every hand, and fearing none,
Now prowl e'en like a grey and treasonous wolf.
'Tis a bad deed to rob, and I'll have none on't :
'Tis a bad deed to rob—and whom ? the dead ?
Aye, of their winding sheets and coffin nails.
'Tis but a quit-rent for the land I sold him,
Almost two yards to house him and his worms :
Somewhat usurious in the main, but that
Is honest thrift to your keen usurer.
Had he a kinsman, nay a friend, 'twere devilish.
But now whom rob I ? why the state—In sooth
Marvellous little owe I this same state,
That I should be so dainty of its welfare.
Methinks our Duke hath pomp enough, our Senate
Sit in their scarlet robes and ermine tippets,

And live in proud and pillar'd palaces,
Where their Greek wines flow plentiful—Besides,
To scatter it abroad amid so many,
It were to cut the sun out into spangles,
And mar its brilliance by dispersing it.
Away! away! his burying is my Rubicon!
Cæsar or nothing! Now, ye close-lock'd treasures,
Put on your gaudiest hues, outshine yourselves!
With a deliverer's, not a tyrant's hand
Invade I thus your dull and peaceful slumbers,
And give ye light and liberty. Ye shall not
Moulder and rust in pale and pitiful darkness,
But front the sun with light bright as his own.

SCENE III.—*The Street near Fazio's Door.*

Reenter FAZIO with a sack: he rests it.

My steps were ever to this door, as though
They trod on beds of perfume and of down.
The winged birds were not by half so light,
When through the lazy twilight air they wheel
Home to their brooding mates. But now, methinks,
The heavy earth doth cling around my feet.
I move as every separate limb were gyved

With its particular weight of manacle.
The moonlight that was wont to seem so soft,
So balmy to the slow respired breath,
Icily, shiveringly cold falls on me.
The marble pillars, that soared stately up,
As though to prop the azure vault of heaven,
Hang o'er me with a dull and dizzy weight.
The stones whereon I tread do grimly speak,
Forbidding echoes, aye with human voices.
Unbodied arms pluck at me as I pass,
And socketless pale eyes look glaring on me.
But I have past them: and methinks this weight
Might strain more sturdy sinews than mine own.
Howbeit, thank God, 'tis safe! Thank God!—for what?
That a poor honest man's grown a rich villain.

SCENE IV.—*Fazio's House.*

Enter FAZIO with his sack, which he opens and surveys.

I thank ye, bounteous thieves! most liberal thieves!
Your daggers are my worship. Have ye leap'd
The broad and sharp-staked trenches of the law,
Mock'd at the deep damnation that attaints
The souls of murderers, for my hands unbloodied,

As delicately, purely white as ever,
To pluck the golden fruitage? Oh, I thank ye,
Will chronicle ye, my good friends and true.

Enter BIANCA. (FAZIO conceals the Treasure.)

BIANCA.

Nay, Fazio, nay: this is too much: nay, Fazio,
I'll not be humour'd like a froward child,
Trick'd into sleep with pretty tuneful tales.

FAZIO.

We feast the Duke to-morrow: shall it be
In the Adorni or Vitelli palace?
They're both on sale, and each is fair and lofty.

BIANCA.

Why, Fazio, art thou frantic? Nay, look not
So strangely, so unmeaningly. I had rather
That thou would'st weep, than look so haggard joyful.

FAZIO.

Aye, and a glorious banquet it shall be:
Gay servants in as proud caparisons,
As though they served immortal Gods with nectar.
Aye, aye, Bianca! there shall be a princess;
She shall be lady of the feast. Let's see
Your gold and crimson for your fair-hair'd beauties:—

It shall be gold and crimson. Dost thou know
The princess that I mean? Dost thou, Bianca?

BIANCA.

Nay, if thou still wilt flout me, I'll not weep :
Thou shalt not have the pitiful bad pleasure
Of wringing me to misery. I'll be cold
And patient as a statue of my wrongs.

FAZIO.

I have just thought, Bianca, these black stills
An ugly and ill-fitting furniture :
We'll try an' they are brittle. (*Dashes them in pieces.*) I'll
have gilding,
Nothing but gilding, nothing but what looks glittering :
I'm sick of black and dingy darkness. Here, (*Uncovering
the sack,*)
Look here, Bianca, here's a light ! Take care :
Thine eyesight is too weak for such a blaze.
It is not daylight ; nay, it is not morn—
And every one is worth a thousand florins.
Who shall be princess of the feast to-morrow ?

[*She bursts into tears.*

Within, within, I'll tell thee all within.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*A Hall in the Palace of Fazio.*

FALSETTO, DANDOLO, PHILARIO, and a Gentleman.

FALSETTO.

Serve ye Lord Fazio?

GENTLEMAN.

Aye, Sir, he honours me

With his commands.

FALSETTO.

'Tis a brave gentleman!

Tell him Signior Falsetto, and Philario

The most renowned Improvisatore,

And Signior Dandolo, the court fashionist,

Present their duty to him.

GENTLEMAN.

Aye, good sirs.

[*Aside*] My master hath a Midas touch; these fellows

Will try if he hath ears like that great king.

[*Exit.*]

Enter FAZIO splendidly dressed.

FALSETTO.

Most noble lord, most wonderful philosopher !
We come to thank thee, sir, that thou dost honour
Our Florence with the sunlight of your fame.
Thou that hast ravish'd nature of a secret
That maketh thee her very paragon :
She can but create gold, and so canst thou :
But she doth bury it in mire and mirk,
Within the unsunn'd bowels of the earth :
But thou dost set it on the face of the world,
Making it shame its old and sullen darkness.

FAZIO.

Fair sir, this cataract of courtesy
O'erwhelms my weak and unhabituate ears.
If I may venture such uncivil ignorance,
Your quality.

FALSETTO.

I, my good lord, am one
Have such keen eyesight for my neighbours' virtues,
And such a doting love for excellence,
That when I see a wise man, or a noble,
Or wealthy, as I ever hold it pity

Man should be blind to his own merits, words
Slide from my lips ; and I do mirror him
In the clear glass of my poor eloquence.

FAZIO.

In coarse and honest phraseology
A flatterer.

FALSETTO.

Flatterer ! Nay, the word's grown gross.
An apt discourser upon things of honour,
Professor of art panegyrical.
'Twere ill were I a hawk to see such bravery,
And not a thrush to sing of it. Wealth, Sir,
Wealth is the robe and outward garb of man,
The setting to the rarer jewelry,
The soul's unseen and inner qualities.
And then, my lord, philosophy ! 'tis that,
The stamp and impress of our divine nature,
By which we know that we are Gods, and are so.
But wealth and wisdom in one spacious breast !
Who would not hymn so rare and rich a wedding ?
Who would not serve within the gorgeous palace,
Glorified by such strange and admired inmates ?

FAZIO (*aside*).

Now the poor honest Fazio had disdain'd
Such scurvy fellowship; howbeit, Lord Fazio
Must lacquey his new state with these base jackalls.

(*To him.*)

Fair sir, you'll honour me with your company.

(*To Dandolo.*)

May I make bold, sir, with your state and title?

DANDOLO.

Oh, my lord, by the falling of your robe,
Your cloth of gold one whole hair's-breadth too low,
'Tis manifest you know not Signior Dandolo.

FAZIO.

A pitiable lack of knowledge, sir.

DANDOLO.

My lord, thou hast before thee in thy presence
The mirror of the court, the very calendar
That rules the swift revolving round of fashion;
Doth tell what hues do suit what height o' the sun;
When your spring pinks should banish from the court
Your sober winter browns; when July heat
Doth authorize the gay and flaunting yellows;—
The court thermometer, that doth command

Your three-piled velvet abdicate its state
For the airy sattins. Oh, my lord, you are too late,
At least three days, with your Venetian tissue.

FAZIO.

I sorrow, sir, to merit your rebuke
On point so weighty.

DANDOLO.

Aye, signior, I'm paramount
In all affairs of boot, and spur, and hose ;
In matters of the robe and cap supreme ;
In ruff disputes, my lord, there's no appeal
From my irrefragability.

FAZIO.

Sweet sir,

I fear me, such despotic rule and sway
Over the persons of our citizens
Must be of danger to our state of Florence.

DANDOLO.

Good sooth, my lord, I am a very tyrant.
Why, if a senator should presume to wear
A cloak of fur in June, I should indict him
Guilty of leze majesté against my kingship :
They call me, Dandolo, the King of Fashions—

The whole empire of dress is my dominion.
Why, if our Duke should wear an ill-grain'd colour
Against my positive enactment, though
His state might shield him from the palpable shame
Of a rebuke ; yet, my good lord, opinion,
Public opinion, would hold Signior Dandolo
Merciful in his silence.

FAZIO.

A Lycurgus.

DANDOLO.

Good, my lord ! dignity must be upheld
On the strong pillars of severity.
Your cap, my lord, a little to the north-east,
And your sword—thus, my lord—pointed out this way,
[Adjusting him.]

In an equilateral triangle. Nay,
Nay, on my credit, my good lord, this hose
Is a fair woof. The ladies, sir, the ladies,
(For I foresee you'll be a ruling planet,)
Must not be taught any heretical fancies,
Fantastical infringements of my codes—
Your lordship must give place to Signior Dandolo
About their persons.

FAZIO.

Gentle sir, the ladies
Must be too deeply, irresistibly yours.

DANDOLO.

No, signior, no ; I'm not one of the gallants,
That pine for a fair lip, or eye, or cheek,
Or that poetical treasure, a true heart.
But, my lord, a fair-order'd head-dress makes me
As love-sick as a dove at mating time :
A tasteful slipper is my soul's delight :
Oh, I adore a robe that drops and floats
As it were lighter than the air around it ;
I dote upon a stomacher to distraction,
When the gay jewels, gracefully dispos'd,
Make it a zone of stars : and then a fan,
The elegant motion of a fan, is murder,
Positive murder to my poor weak senses.

FAZIO (*turning to Philario*).

But here's a third : the Improvisatore,
Gentle Philario, lurks, methinks, behind.

PHILARIO.

Most noble lord ! it were his loftiest boast
To wed your honours to his harp. To hymn

The finder of the philosophic stone,
The sovereign prince of alchymists ; 'twould make
The cold verse-mechanist, the nice balancer
Of curious words and fair compacted phrases,
Burst to a liquid and melodious flow,
Rapturous and ravishing but in praise of thee !
But I, my lord, that have the fluent vein,
The rapid rush——

FAZIO.

Fie, sir ! O fie ! 'tis fulsome.

Sir, there's a soil fit for that rank weed flattery
To trail its poisonous and obscene clusters :
A poet's soul should bear a richer fruitage—
The aconite grew not in Eden. Thou,
That thou, with lips tipt with the fire of heaven,
Th' excursive eye, that in its earth-wide range
Drinks in the grandeur and the loveliness,
That breathes along this high-wrought world of man ;
That hast within thee apprehensions strong
Of all that's pure and passionless and heavenly—
That thou, a vapid and a mawkish parasite,
Should'st pipe to that witch Fortune's favourites !

'Tis coarse—'tis sickly—'tis as though the eagle
Should spread his sail-broad wings to flap a dunghill ;
As though a pale and withering pestilence
Should ride the golden chariot of the sun ;
As one should use the language of the gods
To chatter loose and ribald brothelery.

PHILARIO.

My lord, I thank thee for that noble chiding—
Oh, my lord, 'tis the curse and brand of poesy,
That it must trim its fetterless free plumes
To the gross fancies of the humoursome age ;
That it must stoop from its bold heights to court
Liquorish opinion, whose aye wavering breath
Is to it as the precious air of life.
Oh, in a capering, chambering, wanton land,
The lozel's song alone gains audience,
Fine loving ditties, sweet to sickliness ;
The languishing and luscious touch alone,
Of all the full harp's ecstasies, can detain
The palled and pampered ear of Italy.
But, my lord, we have deeper mysteries
For the initiate——Hark !—it bursts !—it flows !

Song by PHILARIO.

Rich and royal Italy !

Dominion's lofty bride !

Earth deem'd no loss of pride

To be enslaved by thee.

From broad Euphrates' bank,

When the sun look'd through the gloom,

Thy eagle's golden plume

His orient splendor drank ;

And when at eve he set

Far in the chamber'd west,

That bird of brilliance yet

Bathed in his gorgeous rest.

Sad and sunken Italy !

The plunderer's common prey !

When saw the eye of day

So very a slave as thee ?

Long, long a bloody stage

For petty kinglings tame,

Their miserable game

Of puny war to wage.

Or from the northern star
Come haughty despots down,
With iron hand to share
Thy bruised and broken crown.

Fair and fervid Italy !
Lady of each gentler art,
Yet could'st thou lead the heart
In mild captivity.
Warm Raphael's Virgin sprung
To worship and to love,
The enamour'd air above
Rich clouds of music hung.
Thy poets bold and free
Did noble wrong to time,
In their high rhymed majesty
Ravishing thy clime.

Loose and languid Italy !
Where now the magic pow'r,
That in thy doleful hour
Made a queen of thee ?

The pencil cold and dead,
Whose lightest touch was life;
The old immortal strife
Of thy high poets fled.
From her inglorious urn
Will Italy arise?
Will golden days return
'Neath the azure of her skies?

This is done, oh, this is done,
When the broken land is one;
This shall be, oh, this shall be,
When the slavish land is free.

SCENE II.—*The Public Walks of Florence.*

FAZIO, FALSETTO, DANDOLO, PHILARIO.

FALSETTO.

Yonder, my lord, is the lady Aldabella,
The star of admiration to all Florence.

DANDOLO.

There, my lord, there is a fair drooping robe—
Would that I were a breath of wind to float it!

FAZIO.

Gentlemen, by your leave I would salute her :

Ye'll meet me anon in the Piazza. [*Exeunt all but Fazio.*]

Now, lofty woman, we are equal now,

And I will front thee in thy pitch of pride.

Enter ALDABELLA. She speaks after a salutation on each side.

Oh thou and I, Sir, when we met of old,

Were not so distant, nor so chill. My lord—

I had forgot, my lord. You dawning seigniors

Are jealous of your state : you great philosophers

Walk not on earth ; and we poor grovelling beings,

If we would win your eminent regards,

Must meet ye i' the air. Oh, it sits well

This scorn, it looks so grave and reverend.

FAZIO.

Is scorn in Lady Aldabella's creed

So monstrous and heretical ?

ALDABELLA.

Again,

Treason again, a most irreverent laugh,

A traitorous jest before so learn'd a sage :—

But I may joy in thy good fortune, Fazio.

FAZIO.

In sooth, good fortune, if 'tis worth thy joy,
The haughty lady Aldabella's joy.

ALDABELLA.

Nay, an thou hadst not dash'd so careless off
My bounteous offering, I had said—

FAZIO.

What, lady?

ALDABELLA.

Oh nought—mere sound—mere air—Thou'rt married,
Fazio :

And is thy bride a jewel of the first water?

I know thou wilt say, aye; 'tis an old tale,

Thy fond lip-revel on a lady's beauties :

Methinks I have heard thee descant upon loveliness,

Till the full ears were drunken with sweet sounds.

But never let me see her, Fazio; never.

FAZIO.

And why not, lady? She is exquisite

Bashfully, humbly exquisite; yet Florence

May be as proud of her, as of the richest,

That fire her with the lustre of their state.

And why not, lady?

ALDABELLA.

Oh I know not why—

Oh your philosophy, 'tis ever curious ;
 Poor lady Nature must tell all, and clearly,
 To its inquisitorship.—We'll not think on't :
 It fell from me un'wares ; words will start forth,
 When the mind wanders.—Oh no, not because
 She's merely lovely :—but we'll think no more on't.—
 Didst hear the act ?

FAZIO.

Lady, what act ?

ALDABELLA.

The act

Of the great Duke of Florence and his Senate,
 Entitled against turtle doves in poesy.
 Henceforth that useful bird is interdict,
 As the mild emblem of true constancy.
 There's a new word found ; 'tis pure Tuscan too :
 Fazio's to fill the blank up, if it chime ;
 If not, God help the rhymester.

FAZIO (*apart*).

With what an airy and a sparkling grace
 The language glances from her silken lips !

Her once loved voice how exquisite it sounds,
E'en like a gentle music heard in childhood!

ALDABELLA.

Why yes, my lord, in these degenerate days
Constancy is so rare a virtue, angels
Come down to gaze on't : it makes the world proud.
Who would be one o' the many? Why, our Florence
Will blaze with the miracle. 'Tis true, 'tis true,
The odour of the rose grows faint and sickly,
And joys are finest by comparison.—
But what is that to the majestic pride
Of being the sole true phoenix?

FAZIO.

Gentle lady,

Thou speak'st as if that smooth word constancy
Were harsh and brassy sounding in thy ears.

ALDABELLA.

No, no, signior; your good old-fangled virtues
Have gloss enough for me, had it been my lot
To be a miser's treasure : if his eyes
Ne'er open'd but on me, I ne'er had wept
At such a pleasant faithful avarice.

FAZIO.

Lady, there was a time when I did dream
Of playing the miser to another treasure,
One not less precious than thy stately self.

ALDABELLA.

Oh yes, my lord, oh yes; the tale did run
That thou and I did love: so ran the tale.
That thou and I should have been wed—the tale
Ran so, my lord.—Oh memory, memory, memory!
It is a bitter pleasure, but 'tis pleasure.

FAZIO.

A pleasure, lady!—why then cast me off
Like an indifferent weed?—with icy scorn
Why choke the blossom that but woo'd thy sunshine?

ALDABELLA.

Aye, what an easy robe is scorn to wear!
'Tis but to wrinkle up the level brow,
To arch the pliant eyelash, and freeze up
The passionless and placid orb within—
Castelli! oh Castelli!

FAZIO.

Who was he, lady?

ALDABELLA.

One, my good lord, I loved most fondly, fatally.

FAZIO.

Then thou didst love? love, Aldabella, truly,
Fervently, fondly?—But what's that to me?

ALDABELLA.

Oh yes, my lord, he was a noble gentleman ;
Thou know'st him by his title, Condé d'Orsoa ;
My nearest kinsman, my good uncle :—I,
Knowing our passionate and fanciful nature,
To his sage counsels fetter'd my wild will.
Proud was he of me, deem'd me a fit mate
For highest princes ; and his honest flatteries
So pamper'd me, the fatal duteousness
So grew upon me—Fazio, dost thou think
My colour wither'd since we parted ? Gleam
Mine eyes as they were wont ?—Or doth the outside
Still wear a lying smooth indifference,
While the unseen heart is haggard wan with woe ?

FAZIO.

Is't possible ? And didst thou love me, lady ?
Though it be joy vain and unprofitable
As is the sunshine to a dead man's eyes,

Pleasureless from his impotence of pleasure ;
Tell me and truly—

ALDABELLA.

My grave sir confessor,
On with thy hood and cowl.—So thou wouldst hear
Of pining days and discontented nights ;
Aye me's and doleful airs to my sad lute.
Fazio, they suffer most who utter least.—
Heaven, what a babbling traitor is the tongue !—
Would not the air freeze up such sinful sound ?—
Oh no, thou heard'st it not. Aye me ! and thou,
I know, wilt surfeit the coarse common ear
With the proud Aldabella's fall.—Betray me not ;
Be charier of her shame than Aldabella.

[Fazio falls on his knees to her.]

My lord ! .my lord ! 'tis public here—no more—
I'm staid for at my palace by the Arno.
Farewell, my lord, farewell !—Betray me not :—
But never let me see *her*, Fazio, never.

FAZIO (*solus*).

Love me !—to suffering love me !—why her love
Might draw a brazen statue from its pedestal,
And make its yellow veins leap up with life.

Fair Chastity, thou hast two juggling fiends
Caballing for thy jewel: one within,
And that's a mild and melting devil, Love;
Th' other without, and that's a fair rich gentleman,
Giraldi Fazio: they're knit in a league.
And thou, thou snowy and unsociable virtue,
May'st lose no less a votaress from thy nunnery
Than the most beautiful proud Aldabella.
Had I been honest, 'twere indeed to fall;
But now 'tis but a step down the declivity.
Bianca! but Bianca!—bear me up,
Bear me up, in the trammels of thy fondness
Bind thou my slippery soul. Wrong thee, Bianca?
Nay, nay, that's deep indeed; fathomless deep
In the black pit of infamy and sin:
I am not so weary yet of the upper air.
Wrong thee, Bianca? No, not for the earth;
Not for earth's brightest, not for Aldabella.

SCENE III.—*Palace of Fazio.*

FAZIO and BIANCA.

FAZIO.

Dost thou love me, Bianca?

BIANCA.

There's a question

For a philosopher !—Why, I've answer'd it
For two long years ; and, oh, for many more,
It will not stick upon my lips to answer thee.

FAZIO.

Thou'rt in the fashion, then. The court, Bianca,
The ladies of the court, find me a fair gentleman ;
Aye, and a dangerous wit too, that smites smartly.

BIANCA.

And thou believest it all !

FAZIO.

Why, if the gallants,
The lordly and frank spirits of the time,
Troop around thee with gay rhymes on thy beauties,
Tinkling their smooth and amorous flatteries,
Shalt thou be then a solemn infidel ?

BIANCA.

I shall not heed them ; my poor beauty needs
Only one flatterer.

FAZIO.

Aye, but they'll press on thee,
And force their music into thy deaf ears.

Think ye, ye should be coy, and calm, and cold?

BIANCA.

Oh, no!—I fear me a discourteous laugh
Might be their guerdon for their lavish lying.

FAZIO.

But if one trip upon your lip, or wind
Your fingers in his hard hot hand, think ye
Ye could endure it?

BIANCA.

Fazio, thou wrong'st me

With such dishonest questionings. My lord,
There's such an awe in virtue, it can make
The anger of a sleek smooth brow like mine
Strike the hot libertine to dust before me.
He'd dare to dally with a fire in his hand,
Kiss ragged briars with his unholy lips,
Ere with his rash assault attain my honour.

FAZIO.

But if ye see me by a noble lady,
Whispering as though she were my shrine, whereon
I lay my odorous incense, and her beauty
Grow riper, richer at my cherishing praise;
If she lean on me with a fond round arm,

If her eye drink the light from out mine eyes,
And if her lips drop sounds for my ear only;
Thou'lt arch thy moody brow, look at me gravely,
With a pale anger on thy silent cheek.
'Tis out of keeping, 'tis not the court fashion—
We must forego this clinging and the clasping;
Be cold, and strange, and courteous to each other;
And say, “How doth my lord?” “How slept my lady?”
As though we dwelt at opposite ends o' the city.

BIANCA.

What hath distemper'd thee?—This is unnatural;
Thou could'st not talk thus in thy stedfast senses.
Fazio, thou hast seen Aldabella!—

FAZIO.

Well,

She is no basilisk—there's no death in her eyes.

BIANCA.

Aye, Fazio, but there is; and more than death—
A death beyond the grave—a death of sin—
A howling, hideous, and eternal death—
Death the flesh shrinks from. —No, thou must not see her!
Nay, I'm imperative—thou'rt mine, and shalt not.

FAZIO.

Shalt not !—Dost think me a thick-blooded slave,
To say “Amen” unto thy positive “shalt not?”
The hand upon a dial, only to point
Just as your humorous ladyship choose to shine?

BIANCA.

Fazio, thou settest a fever in my brain;
My very lips burn, Fazio, at the thought:
I had rather see thee in thy winding-sheet
Than that bad woman’s arms; I had rather grave-worms
Were on thy lips than that bad woman’s kisses.

FAZIO.

Howbeit, there is no blistering in their taste:
There is no suffocation in those arms—
They are soft, and white, and supple.

BIANCA.

Ah! take heed,

Take heed; we are passionate; our milk of love
Doth turn to wormwood, and that’s bitter drinking.
The fondest are most phrenetic: where the fire
Burneth intensest, there the inmate pale
Doth dread the broad and beaoning conflagration.
If that ye cast us to the winds, the winds

Will give us their unruly restless nature ;
We whirl and whirl ; and where we settle, Fazio,
But he that ruleth the mad winds can know.
If ye do drive the love out of my soul,
That is its motion, being, and its life,
There'll be a conflict strange and horrible,
Among all fearful and ill-visaged fiends,
For the blank void ; and their mad revel there
Will make me—oh, I know not what—hate thee !——
Oh, no !—I could not hate thee, Fazio :
Nay, nay, my Fazio, 'tis not come to that ;
Mine arms, mine arms, shall say the next “ shall not ; ”
I'll never startle more thy peevish ears,
But I'll speak to thee with my positive lips.

[Kissing and clinging to him.]

FAZIO.

Oh, what a wild and wayward child am I !—
Like the hungry fool, that in his moody fit
Dash'd from his lips his last delicious morsel.
I'll see her once, Bianca, and but once ;
And then a rich and breathing tale I'll tell her
Of our full happiness. If she be angel,
'Twill be a gleam of Paradise to her,

And she'll smile at it one of those soft smiles,
That makes the air seem sunny, blithe, and balmy.
If she be devil——Nay, but that's too ugly ;
The fancy doth rebel at it, and shrink
As from a serpent in a knot of flowers.
Devil and Aldabella !—Fie !—They sound
Like nightingales and screech-owls heard together.
What ! must I still have tears to kiss away ?—
I will return—Good night !—It is but once.
See, thou'st the taste o' my lips now at our parting ;
And when we meet again, if they be tainted,
Thou shalt—oh no, thou shalt not, canst not hate me.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE IV.—*Palace of ALDABELLA.*

ALDABELLA.

My dainty bird doth hover round the lure,
And I must hood him with a skilful hand :
Rich and renown'd, he must be in my train,
Or Florence will turn rebel to my beauty.

Enter CLARA, FAZIO behind.

ALDABELLA *goes on.*

Oh, Clara, have ye been to the Ursulines ?
What says my cousin, the kind Lady Abbess ?

CLARA.

She says, my lady, that to-morrow noon
 Noviciates are admitted ; but she wonders,
 My Lady Abbess wonders, and I too
 Wonder, my lady, what can make ye fancy
 Those damp and dingy cloisters. Oh, my lady !
 They'll make ye cut off all this fine dark hair——
 Why, all the signiors in the court would quarrel,
 And cut each other's throats for a loose hair of it.

ALDABELLA.

Aye me ! what heeds it where I linger out
 The remnant of my dark and despised life ?——
 Clara, thou weariest me.

CLARA.

Oh but, my lady,
 I saw their dress : it was so coarse and hard-grain'd,
 I'm sure 'twould fret your ladyship's soft skin
 Like thorns and brambles ; and besides, the make on't !—
 A vine-dresser's wife at market looks more dainty.

ALDABELLA.

Then my tears will not stain it. Oh, 'tis rich enough
 For lean and haggard sorrow. (*Appearing to perceive FAZIO,*
exit CLARA.) Oh, my lord !

You're timely come to take a long farewell.
Our convent gates are rude, and black, and close;
Our Ursuline veils of such a jealous woof,
There must be piercing in those curious eyes,
Would know if the skin beneath be swarth or snowy.

FAZIO.

A convent for the brilliant Aldabella!
The mirror of all rival lovelinesses,
The harp to which all gay thoughts lightly dance,
Mew'd in the drowsy silence of a cloister!

ALDABELLA.

Oh, what regards it, if a blind man lie
On a green lawn or on a steamy moor!
What heeds it to the dead and wither'd heart,
Whose faculty of rapture is grown sere,
Hath lost distinction between foul and fair,
Whether it house in gorgeous palaces,
Or mid wan graves and haggard signs of care!
Oh, there's a grief, so with the threads of being
Revell'd and twined, it sickens every sense:
Then is the swinging and monotonous bell
Musical as the rich harp heard by moonlight;

Then are the limbs insensible if they rest
On the coarse pallet or the pulpy down.

FAZIO.

What mean ye, lady?—thou bewilder'st me.
What grief so wanton and luxurious
Would choose the lady Aldabella's bosom
To pillow on?

ALDABELLA.

Oh, my lord, untold love——
Nay, Fazio, gaze not on me so; my tongue
Can scarcely move for the fire within my cheeks—
It cankereth, it consumeth, untold love.
But if it burst its secret prison house,
And venture on the broad and public air,
It leagueth with a busy fiend call'd Shame;
And they both dog their game, till misery
Fastens upon it with a viper's fang,
And rings its being with its venomous coil.

FAZIO.

Misery and thee!—oh, 'tis unnatural!—
Oh, yoke thee to that thing of darkness, misery!—
That Ethiop, that grim Moor!—it were to couple

The dove and kite within one loving leash.

It must not be ; nay, ye must be divorced.

ALDABELLA.

Ah no, my lord ! we are too deeply pledg'd.

Dost thou remember our old poet's^a legend

Over Hell gates—"Hope comes not here?" Where hope

Comes not, is hell ; and what have I to hope ?

FAZIO.

What hast to hope ?—Thou'rt strangely beautiful——

ALDABELLA.

Would'st thou leave flattery thy last ravishing sound

Upon mine ears ?—'Tis kind, 'tis fatally kind.

FAZIO.

Oh, no ! we must not part, we must not part.

I came to tell thee something : what, I know not.

I only know one word that should have been ;

And that——Oh ! if thy skin were seam'd with wrinkles,

If on thy cheek sate sallow hollowness,

If thy warm voice spake shrieking, harsh, and shrill ;

But to that breathing form, those ripe round lips,

Like a full parted cherry, those dark eyes,

Rich in such dewy languors——I'll not say it——

^a Dante.

Nay, nay, 'tis on me now!—Poison's at work!
Now listen to me, lady——We must love.

ALDABELLA.

Love!—Aye, my lord, as far as honesty.

FAZIO.

Honesty!—'Tis a stale and musty phrase;
At least at court: and why should we be traitors
To the strong tyrant Custom?

ALDABELLA.

My lord Fazio—

Oh, said I *my* lord Fazio?—thou'lt betray me:
The bride—the wife—she that I mean——My lord,
I am nor splenetic nor envious;
But 'tis a name I dare not trust my lips with.

FAZIO.

Bianca, oh Bianca is her name;
The mild Bianca, the soft fond Bianca.
Oh to that name, e'en in the Church of God,
I pledged a solemn faith.

ALDABELLA.

Within that Church
Barren and solitary my sad name

Shall sound, when the pale nun profess'd doth wed
That her cold bridegroom Solitude: and yet—
Her right—ere she had seen you, we had loved.

FAZIO (*frantickly*).

Why should we dash the goblet from our lips,
Because the dregs may have a smack of bitter?
Why should that pale and clinging consequence
Thrust itself ever 'twixt us and our joys?

ALDABELLA.

My lord, 'tis well our convent walls are high,
And our grates massy; else ye raging tigers
Might rush upon us simple maids unveil'd.

FAZIO.

A veil! a veil! why Florence will be dark
At noonday: or thy beauty will fire up,
By the contagion of its own bright lustre,
The dull dead flax to so intense a brilliance,
'Twill look like one of those rich purple clouds
On the pavilion of the setting sun.

ALDABELLA.

My lord, I've a poor banquet here within;
Wilt please ye taste it?

FAZIO.

Aye wine, wine! aye wine!

I'll drown thee, thou officious preacher, here! (*Clasping
his forehead.*)

Wine, wine!

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Palace of Fazio.*

BIANCA.

Not all the night, not all the long, long night,
Not come to me! not send to me! not think on me!
Like an unrighteous and unburied ghost,
I wander up and down these long arcades.
Oh, in our old poor narrow home, if haply
He linger'd late abroad, domestic things
Close and familiar crowded all around me;
The ticking of the clock, the flapping motion
Of the green lattice, the grey curtains' folds,
The hangings of the bed myself had wrought,
Yea e'en his black and iron crucibles,
Were to me as my friends. But here, oh here,
Where all is coldly, comfortlessly costly,
All strange, all new in uncouth gorgeousness,
Lofty and long, a wider space for misery—
E'en my own footsteps on these marble floors
Are unaccustom'd, unfamiliar sounds.—
Oh, I am here so wearily miserable,
That I should welcome my apostate Fazio,

Though he were hot from Aldabella's arms.
Her arms!—her viper coil!—I had forsworn
That thought; lest he should come, and find me mad,
And so go back again, and I not know it.
Oh that I were a child to play with toys,
Fix my whole soul upon a cup and ball—
Oh any pitiful poor subterfuge,
A moment to distract my busy spirit
From its dark dalliance with that cursed image!
I have tried all: all vainly—Now, but now
I went in to my children. The first sounds
They murmur'd in their evil-dreaming sleep
Was a faint mimicry of the name of father.
I could not kiss them, my lips were so hot.
The very household slaves are leagued against me,
And do beset me with their wicked floutings,
“Comes my lord home to night?”—and when I say,
“I know not,” their coarse pity makes my heartstrings
Throb with the agony.—(*Enter PIERO.*)—Well, what of
my lord?
Nay, tell it with thy lips, not with thy visage.
Thou raven, croak it out if it be evil:
If it be good, I'll fall and worship thee;

'Tis the office and the ministry of gods
To speak good tidings to distracted spirits.

PIERO.

Last night my lord did feast—

BIANCA.

Speak it at once—

Where? where?—I'll wring it from thy lips.—Where?
where?

PIERO.

Lady, at the Marchesa Aldabella's.

BIANCA.

Thou liest, false slave: 'twas at the Ducal Palace,
'Twas at the arsenal with the officers,
'Twas with the old rich senator—him—him—him—
The man with a brief name; 'twas gaming, dicing,
Riotously drinking.—Oh it was not there;
'Twas any where but there—or if it was,
Why like a sly and creeping adder sting me
With thy black tidings?—Nay, nay: good my friend;
Here's money for those harsh intemperate words.—
But he's not there: 'twas some one of the gallants,
With dress and stature like my Fazio.
Thou wert mistaken:—no, no; 'twas not Fazio.

PIERO.

It grieves me much ; but, lady, 'tis my fear
Thou'lt find it but too true.

BIANCA.

Hence ! hence !—Avaunt,
With thy cold courteous face ! Thou seest I'm wretched :
Doth it content thee ?—Gaze—gaze—gaze !—perchance
Ye would behold the bare and bleeding heart,
With all its throbs, its agonies.—Oh Fazio !
Oh Fazio ! Are her arms more fond than mine ?
Her bosom softer ?—Fazio, my lord Fazio !
Before the face of man mine own, mine only ;
Before the face of Heaven Bianca's Fazio,
Not Aldabella's.—Ah, that I should live
To question it !—Now henceforth all our joys,
Our delicate endearments, all are poison'd.
Aye ! if he speak my name with his fond voice,
It will be with the same tone that to her
He murmur'd her's :—it will be, or 'twill seem so.
If he embrace me, 'twill be with those arms
In which he folded her : and if he kiss me,
He'll pause, and think which of the two is sweeter.

PIERO.

Nay, good my lady, give not entertainment
To such sick fancies : think on lighter matters.
I heard strange news abroad : the Duke's in council,
Debating on the death of old Bartolo,
The grey lean usurer. He's been long abroad,
And died, they think.

BIANCA.

Well, sir, and what of that ?

And have I not the privilege of sorrow,
Without a menial's staring eye upon me ?
Who sent thee thus to charter my free thoughts,
And tell them where to shrink, and where to pause ?
Officious slave, away !—(*Exit.*)—Ha, what saidst thou ?
Bartolo's death ! and the Duke in his council !—
I'll rend him from her, though she wind around him,
Like the vine round the elm. I'll pluck him off,
Though the life crack at parting.—No, no pause ;
For if there is, I shall be tame and timorous :
That milk-faced mercy will come whimpering to me,
And I shall sit and meekly, miserably
Weep o'er my wrongs.—Ha ! that her soul were fond

And fervent as mine own ! I would give worlds
To see her as he's rent from out her arms.
Oh, but she's cold ; she cannot, will not feel.
It is but half revenge : her whole of sorrow
Will be a drop to my consummate agony.—
Yet do I linger—yet, when I might dash
At least two minutes of their unchaste raptures.—
Away, away : oh had I wings to fly to it !

SCENE II.—*Duke and his Council.*

DUKE.

'Tis passing strange, a man of such lean habits,
Wealth flowing to him in a steady current,
Winds wafting it unto him from all quarters,
Through all his seventy toilsome years of life,
And yet his treasury so spare and meagre ;
Signior Gonsalvo, were the voice that told us
Less tried and trusty than thine own, our faith
Would be a rebel to such marvellous fact.

GONSALVO.

Well may your Highness misdoubt me, myself
Almost misdoubting mine own positive senses.

No sign was there of outward violence,
All in a state of orderly misery,
No trace of secret inroad; yet, my liege,
The mountains of his wealth were puny molehills,
A few stray ducats; piles indeed of parchments,
Mortgages, deeds, and lawsuits heaped to the roof,
Enough to serve the armies of all Tuscany
At least for half a century with new drumheads.

AURIO.

Haply, my liege, he may have gone abroad,
And borne his riches with him.

DUKE.

Signior Aurio,
That surmise flavours not of your known wisdom.
His argosies encumber all our ports,
His unsold bales rot in the crowded wharfs;
The interest of a hundred usuries
Lieth unclaim'd.—Besides, he hath not left
Our city for this twenty years:—a flight
So unprepared and wanton suits not well
Your slow and heavy laden usurer.

Enter ANTONIO.

My liege, a lady in the antechamber

Boasts knowledge that concerns your this day's council.

DUKE.

Admit her.—(*Enter BIANCA.*)—How! what know'st thou
of the death

Of old Bartolo?—be he dead in sooth?

Or of his riches?

BIANCA.

The east side o' the fountain,

In the small garden of a lowly house,

By the Franciscan convent, the green herbs

Grow boon and freely, the manure is rich

Around their roots: dig there, and you'll be wiser.

DUKE.

Who tenanted this house?

BIANCA.

Giraldi Fazio.

DUKE.

What of his wealth?

BIANCA.

There's one in Florence knows

More secrets than beseems an honest man.

DUKE.

And who is he?

BIANCA.

Giraldi Fazio.

GONSALVO.

My liege, I know him : 'tis the new sprung signior,
This great philosopher. I ever doubted
His vaunted manufactory of gold,
Work'd by some strange machinery.

DUKE.

Theodore,

Search thou the garden that this woman speaks of.
Captain Antonio, be't thy charge to attach
With speed the person of this Fazio.

BIANCA (*rushing forward to ANTONIO*).

You'll find him at the Marchesa Aldabella's :
Bring him away—no mercy—no delay—
Nay, not an instant—not time for a kiss,
A parting kiss. (*Aside*) Now have I widow'd her,
As she has widow'd me ! Now come what will,
Their curst entwining arms are riven asunder.

DUKE.

And thou, thou peremptory summoner !
Most thirsty after justice ! speak——Thy name ?

BIANCA.

Bianca.

DUKE.

Thy estate wedded or single?

BIANCA.

My lord——

DUKE.

Give instant answer to the court.

BIANCA.

Oh, wedded, but most miserably single.

DUKE.

Woman, thou palterest with our dignity.

Thy husband's name and quality?—Why shakest thou,

And draw'st the veil along thy moody brow,

As thou too wert a murderess?—Speak, and quickly.

BIANCA (*faltering*).

Giraldi Fazio.

DUKE.

'Tis thy husband then—

Woman, take heed, if, petulant and rash,

Thou would'st abuse the righteous sword of law,

That brightest in the armoury of man,

To a peevish instrument of thy light passions,
Or furtherance of some close and secret guilt :
Take heed, 'tis in the heaven-stamp'd roll of sins,
To bear false witness——Oh, but 'gainst thy husband,
Thy bosom's lord, flesh of thy flesh !—To set
The bloodhounds of the law upon his track !
If thou speak'st true, stern justice will but blush
To be so cheer'd upon her guilty prey.
If it be false, thou givest to flagrant sin
A heinous immortality. This deed
Will chronicle thee, woman, to all ages,
In human guilt a portent and an era :
'Tis of those crimes, whose eminent fame Hell joys at ;
And the celestial angels, that look on it,
Wish their keen airy vision dim and narrow.

Enter THEODORE.

My liege, e'en where she said, an unstripp'd corpse
Lay carelessly inearth'd, old weeds hung on it,
Like those that old Bartolo wont to wear ;
And under the left rib a small stiletto,
Rusted within the pale and creeping flesh.

Enter ANTONIO with FAZIO.

My liege, the prisoner.

DUKE.

Thou'rt Giraldi Fazio.

Giraldi Fazio, thou stand'st here arraign'd,
That, with presumption impious and accurst,
Thou hast usurp'd God's high prerogative,
Making thy fellow mortal's life and death
Wait on thy moody and diseased passions ;
That with a violent and untimely steel
Hast set abroach the blood, that should have ebb'd
In calm and natural current : to sum all
In one wild name—a name the pale air freezes at,
And every cheek of man sinks in with horror—
Thou art a cold and midnight murderer.

FAZIO.

My liege, I do beseech thee, argue not,
From the thick clogging of my clammy breath,
Ought but a natural and instinctive dread
Of such a bloody and ill-sounding title.
My liege, I do beseech thee, whate'er reptile
Hath cast this filthy slime of slander on me,
Set him before me face to face : the fire
Of my just anger shall burn up his heart,
Make his lip drop, and powerless shuddering

Creep o'er his noisome and corrupted limbs,
Till the coarse lie choke in his wretched throat.

DUKE.

Thou'rt bold.—But know ye ought of old Bartolo?
Methinks, for innocence, thou'rt pale and tremulous—
That name is to thee as a thunderclap;
But thou shalt have thy wish.—Woman, stand forth:
Nay, cast away thy veil.—Look on her, Fazio.

FAZIO.

Bianca!—No, it is a horrid vision!
And, if I struggle, I shall wake, and find it
A miscreated mockery of the brain.
If thou'rt a fiend, what hellish right hast thou
To shroud thy leprous and fire-seam'd visage
In lovely lineaments, like my Bianca's?
If thou'rt indeed Bianca, thou wilt wear
A ring I gave thee at our wedding time.
In God's name do I bid thee hold it up;
And, if thou dost, I'll be a murderer,
A slaughterer of whole hecatombs of men,
So ye will rid me of the hideous sight.

DUKE.

Giraldi Fazio, hear the court's award:

First, on thy evil-gotten wealth the State
Setteth her solemn seal of confiscation ;
And for thyself——

BIANCA (*rushing forward*).

Oh, we'll be poor again !
Oh, I forgive thee !—We'll be poor and happy !
So happy, the dull day shall be too short for us.
She lov'd thee, that proud woman, for thy riches ;
But thou canst tell why I love Fazio.

DUKE.

And for thyself—'Tis in the code of Heaven,
Blood will have blood—the slayer for the slain.
Death is thy doom—the public, daylight death.
Thy body do we give unto the wheel :
The lord have mercy on thy sinful soul !

BIANCA.

Death !—Death !—I meant not that !——Ye mean not that !
What's all this waste and idle talk of murder ?
He slay a man—with tender hands like his ?—
With delicate mild soul ?——Why, his own blood
Had startled him ! I've seen him pale and shuddering
At the sad writhings of a trampled worm :
I've seen him brush off with a dainty hand

A bee that stung him. Oh, why wear ye thus
The garb and outward sanctity of law?
What means that snow upon your reverend brows,
If that ye have no subtler apprehension
Of some inherent harmony in the nature
Of bloody criminal and bloody crime?
'Twere wise t' arraign the soft and silly lamb
Of slaughtering his butcher: ye might make it
As proper a murderer as my Fazio.

DUKE.

Woman, th' irrevocable breath of justice
Wavers not: he must die.

BIANCA.

Die! Fazio die!——

Ye grey and solemn murderers by charter!
Ye ermined manslayers! when the tale is rife
With blood and guilt, and deep and damning, oh,
Ye suck it in with cold insatiate thirst:
But to the plea of mercy ye are stones,
As deaf and hollow as the unbowell'd winds.
Oh, ye smooth Christians in your tones and looks,
But in your hearts as savage as the tawny
And misbelieving African! ye profane,

Who say, "God bless him! God deliver him!"
While ye are beckoning for the bloody axe,
To smite the unoffending head!—His head!—
My Fazio's head!—the head this wretched bosom
Heaved on its virgin tremors.

DUKE.

Fazio, hear.

To-morrow's morning sun shall dawn upon thee:
But when he setteth in his western couch,
He finds thy place in this world void and vacant.

BIANCA.

To-morrow morning!—Not to-morrow morning!
The damning devils give a forced faint pause,
If the bad soul but feebly catch at heaven.
But ye, but ye, unshriven, unreconciled,
With all its ponderous mass of sins, hurl down
The bare and shivering spirit.—Oh, not to-morrow!

DUKE.

Woman, thou dost outstep all modesty:
But for strong circumstance, that leagues with thee,
We should condemn thee for a wild mad woman,
Raving her wayward and unsettled fancies.

BIANCA.

Mad! mad!—aye, that it is!—aye, that it is!
Is't to be mad to speak, to move, to gaze,
But not know how, or why, or whence, or where?
To see that there are faces all around me,
Floating within a dim discolour'd haze,
Yet have distinction, vision, but for one?
To speak with rapid and continuous flow,
Yet know not how the unthought words start from me—
Oh, I am mad, wildly, intensely mad.
'Twas but last night the moon was at the full;
And ye, and ye, the sovereign and the sage,
The wisdom and the reverence of all Florence,
E'en from a maniac's dim disjointed tale,
Do calmly judge away the innocent life,
The holy human life, the life God gave him.

DUKE.

Giraldi Fazio, hast thou ought to plead
Against the law, that with imperious hand
Grasps at thy forfeit life?

FAZIO.

My liege, this soul
Rebels not, nay, repines not at thy sentence:

Yet, oh! by all on earth, by all hereafter,
All that hath cognizance o'er unseen deeds,
Blood is a colour stranger to these hands.
But there are crimes within me, deep and black,
That with their clamorous and tumultuous voices
Shout at me, "Thou should'st die, thy sins are deadly:"
Nor dare my oppressed heart return, "'Tis false."

BIANCA.

But I, I say, 'tis false: he is not guilty:
Not guilty unto death: I say he is not.
God gave ye hearing, but ye will not hear;
God gave ye feeling, but ye will not feel;
God gave ye judgment, but ye falsely judge.

DUKE.

Captain Antonio, guard thy prisoner.
If it be true, blood is not on thy soul,
Yet thou object'st not to the charge of robbery? [*Fazio bows.*
Thou dost not. Robbery, by the laws of Florence,
Is sternly coded as a deadly crime:
Therefore, I say again, Giraldi Fazio,
The Lord have mercy on thy sinful soul!

[*They follow the Duke.*

BIANCA (*seizing and detaining Aurio*).

My lord ! my lord ! we have two babes at home—
They cannot speak yet ; but, your name, my lord,
And they shall lisp it, ere they lisp mine own—
Ere that poor culprit's yonder, their own father's.
Befriend us, oh, befriend us ! 'Tis a title
Heaven joys at, and the hard and savage earth
Doth break its sullen nature to delight in—
The destitute's sole friend——And thou pass too !
Why, what a common liar was thy face,
That said the milk of mercy flow'd within thee !——
Ye're all alike.—Off ! off !—Ye're all alike.

[*Exeunt all but FAZIO, the Officer, and BIANCA.*

BIANCA (*creeping to FAZIO*).

Thou wilt not spurn me, wilt not trample on me,
Wilt let me touch thee—I, whose lips have slain thee.
Oh, look not on me thus with that fond look—
Pamper me not, for long and living grief
To prey upon—Oh, curse me, Fazio—
Kill me with cursing : I am thin and feeble—
A word will crush me—anything but kindness.

FAZIO.

Mine own Bianca ! I shall need too much mercy

Or ere to-morrow, to be merciless.
It was not well, Bianca, in my guilt
To cut me off—thus early—thus unripe :
It will be bitter, when the axe falls on me,
To think whose voice did summon it to its office.—
No more—no more of that : we all must die.
Bianca, thou wilt love me when I'm dead :
I wrong'd thee, but thou'lt love me when I'm dead.

BIANCA.

What, kiss me, kiss me, Fazio !—'tis too much :
And these warm lips must be cold clay to-morrow.

ANTONIO.

Signior, we must part hence.

BIANCA.

What ! tear me from him,
When he has but a few short hours to give me !
Rob me of them !—He hath lain delicately :
Thou wilt not envy me the wretched office
Of strewing the last pillow he shall lie on—
Thou wilt not—nay, there's moisture in thine eye—
Thou wilt not.

ANTONIO.

Lady, far as is the warrant
Of my stern orders—

BIANCA.

Excellent youth ! Heaven thank thee !

There's not another heart like thine in Florence.

We shall not part, we shall not part, my Fazio !

Oh, never, never, never——till *to-morrow*.

FAZIO (*as he leads her out*).

It was not with this cold and shaking hand

I led thee virgin to the bridal altar.

[*Exeunt.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Prison.*

FAZIO and BIANCA.

FAZIO.

Let's talk of joy, Bianca : we'll deceive
This present and this future, whose grim faces
Stare at us with such deep and hideous blackness :
We'll fly to the past. Dost thou remember, love,
Those gentle moonlights, when my fond guitar
Was regular, as convent vesper hymn,
Beneath thy lattice, sometimes the light dawn
Came stealing on our voiceless intercourse,
Soft in its grey and filmy atmosphere ?

BIANCA.

Oh yes, oh yes!—There'll be a dawn *to-morrow*
Will steal upon us.—Then, oh then——

FAZIO.

Oh, think not on't!—

And thou remember'st too that beauteous evening
Upon the Arno; how we sail'd along,
And laugh'd to see the stately towers of Florence
Waver and dance in the blue depth beneath us.
How carelessly thy loose and swelling hand
Abandon'd its soft whiteness to my pressure?

BIANCA.

Oh yes!——*To-morrow* evening, if thou close
Thy clasping hand, mine will not meet it then—
Thou'lt only grasp the chill and senseless earth.

FAZIO.

Thou busy, sad remembrancer of evil!——
How exquisitely happy have we two
Sate in the dusky and discolour'd light,
That flicker'd through our shaking lattice bars!
Our children at our feet, or on our laps,
Warm in their breathing slumbers, or at play
With rosy laughter on their cheeks!——Oh God!——
Bianca, such a flash of thought crost o'er me,
I dare not speak it.

BIANCA.

Quick, my Fazio!

Quick, let me have't!——*to-morrow* thou'lt not speak it.

FAZIO.

Oh, what a life must theirs be, those poor innocents!
When they have grown up to a sense of sorrow—
Oh, what a feast will they be for rude misery!
Honest men's boys and girls, whene'er they mingle,
Will spurn them with the black and branded title,
“The murderer's children.” Infamy will pin
That pestilent label on their backs; the plague spot
Will bloat and blister on them till their death-beds;
And if they beg—for beggars they must be—
They'll drive them from their doors with cruel jeers
Upon my riches, villainously style them
“The children of Lord Fazio, the philosopher.”

BIANCA.

To-morrow will the cry begin, *to-morrow*.——
It must not be, and I sit idle here.
Fazio, there must be in this wide wide city
Piercing and penetrating eyes for truth,
Souls not too proud, too cold, too stern for mercy.
I'll hunt them out, and swear them to our service.
I'll raise up something—oh, I know not what—
Shall boldly startle the rank air of Florence
With proclamation of thy innocence.

I'll raise the dead ! I'll conjure up the ghost
Of that old rotten thing, Bartolo ; make it
Cry out i' the market-place, " Thou didst not slay him !"
Farewell, farewell ! If in the walls of Florence
Be anything like hope or comfort, Fazio,
I'll clasp it with such strong and stedfast arms,
I'll drag it to thy dungeon, and make laugh
This silence with strange uncouth sounds of joy.

SCENE II.—*A Street.*

FALSETTO, DANDOLO, PHILARIO.

FALSETTO.

Good Signior Dandolo, here's a prodigal waste
Of my fair speeches to the sage philosopher.
I counted on at least a two months diet,
Besides stray boons of horses, rings, and jewels.

DANDOLO.

Oh my Falsetto, a coat of my fashion
Come to the wheel !—it wrings my very heart,
To fancy how the seams will crack, or haply
The hangman will be seen in't !—That I should live
To be purveyor of the modes to a hangman !

Enter BIANCA.

They pass me by on the other side of the street ;
They spurn me from their doors ; they load the air
With curses that are flung on me : the Palace,
The Ducal Palace, that should aye be open
To voice of the distress'd, as is God's heaven,
Is ring'd around with grim and iron savages,
That with their angry weapons smite me back,
As though I came with fire in my hand, to burn
The royal walls : the children in the streets
Break off their noisy games to hoot at me ;
And the dogs from the porches howl me on.
But here's a succour.—(*To Falsetto.*) Oh, good sir, thy
friend,

The man thou feastedst with but yesterday,
He to whose motion thou wast a true shadow,
Whose hand rain'd gifts upon thee—he I mean,
Fazio, the bounteous, free, and liberal Fazio—
He's wrongfully accused, wrongfully doom'd :
I swear to thee 'tis wrongfully.—Oh, sir,
An eloquent honey-dropping tongue like thine,
How would it garnish up his innocence,
Till Justice would grow amorous and embrace it !

FALSETTO.

Sweet lady, thou o'ervaluest my poor powers :—
Anything in reason to win so much loveliness
To smile on me.—But this were wild and futile.

BIANCA.

In reason ?—'Tis to save a human life—
Is not that in the spacious realm of reason ?—
Kind sir, there's not a prayer will mount hereafter
Heavenward from us or our poor children's lips,
But in it thy dear name will rise embalm'd :
And prayers have power to cancel many a sin,
That clogs and flaws our coarse and corrupt nature.

FALSETTO.

Methinks, good Dandolo, 'tis the hour we owe
Attendance at the Lady Portia's toilette.—
Any commission in our way, fair lady ?.

DANDOLO.

Oh yes ! I'm ever indispensable there
As is her looking glass.—

BIANCA.

Riotous madness !

To waste a breath (*Detaining them*) upon such thin-blown
bubbles !

Why thou didst cling to him but yesterday,
As 'twere a danger of thy life to part from him;
Didst swear it was a sin in Providence
He was not born a prince.—(*To Dandolo*) And thou, sir,
thou—

Chains, sir, in May—it is a heavy wear;
Hard and unseemly, a rude weight of iron.—
Faugh! cast ye off this shape and skin of men;
Ye stain it, ye pollute it: be the reptiles
Ye are.—(*To Philario*) And thou, sir—I know in whose
porch,

He hired thee to troll out thy fulsome ditties:
I know whose dainty ears were last night banqueted
With the false harlotry of thy rich airs.

PHILARIO.

I do beseech thee, lady, judge me not
So harshly. In the state, Heaven knows, I'm powerless:
I could remove yon palace walls, as soon
As alter his sad doom. But if to visit him,
To tend him with a soft officious zeal,
Waft the mild magic of mine art around him,
Making the chill and lazy dungeon air
More smooth, more gentle to the trammell'd breathing:—

All that I can I will, to make his misery
Slide from him light and airily.

BIANCA.

Wilt thou?

Why then there's hope the Devil hath not all Florence.
Go—go!—I cannot point thee out the way :
Mine eyes are cloudy ; it is the first rain
Hath dewed them, since—since when I cannot tell thee.—
Go—go!—(*Exit.*)—One effort more ; and if I fail—
But by the inbred and instinctive tenderness
That mingles with the life of womanhood,
I cannot fail : and then, thou grim to-morrow,
I'll meet thee with a bold and unblench'd front.

SCENE III.—*Palace of Aldabella.*

ALDABELLA.

Fazio in prison ! Fazio doom'd to die !—
I was too hasty ; should have fled, and bashfully
Beckon'd him after ; lured him, not seized on him.
Proud Aldabella a poor robber's paramour !
Oh it sounds dismal ! Florence must not hear it :—
And sooth his time is brief to descant on it.—

(*To BIANCA, who enters.*)

And who art thou thus usherless and unbidden
Scarest my privacy?

BIANCA (*aside*).

I must not speak yet;
For if I do, a curse will clog my utterance.

ALDABELLA.

Nay, stand not with thy pale lips quivering nothings—
Speak out, and freely.

BIANCA.

Lady, there is one—
Fie, fie upon this choking in my throat—
One thou didst love, Giraldi Fazio;
One who loved thee, Giraldi Fazio.—
He's doom'd to die, to die to-morrow morning;
And lo 'tis eve already!—

ALDABELLA.

He is doom'd?—
Why then the man must die.—

BIANCA.

Nay, gentle lady,
'Thou'rt high-born, rich, and beautiful: the princes,
The prime of Florence wait upon thy smiles,

Like sunflowers on the golden light they love.
Thy lips have such sweet melody, 'tis hung upon
Till silence is an agony. Did it plead
For one condemn'd, but oh most innocent,
'Twould be a music th' air would fall in love with,
And never let it die, till it had won
Its honest purpose.

ALDABELLA.

What a wanton waste
Of idle praise is here!

BIANCA.

Nay think, oh think,
What 'tis to give again a forfeit life :
Aye, such a life as Fazio's !—Frown not on me :
Thou think'st that he's a murderer—'tis all false ;
A trick of Fortune, fancifully cruel,
To cheat the world of such a life as Fazio's.

ALDABELLA.

Frivolous and weak : I could not if I would.

BIANCA.

Nay, but I'll lure thee with so rich a boon—
Hear—hear, and thou art won. If thou dost save him,
It is but just he should be saved for thee.

I give him thee—Bianca—I his wife :—
I pardon all that has been, all that may be—
Oh I will be the handmaid to thy pleasures ;
Trim up the pillow for ye ; be so patient—
Calmly, contentedly, and sadly patient—
And if ye see a pale or envious motion
Upon my cheek, a quivering on my lips,
Like to complaint—then strike him dead before me.
Thou shalt enjoy all—all that I enjoy'd :—
His love, his life, his sense, his soul be thine ;
And I will bless thee, in my misery bless thee.

ALDABELLA.

What mist is on thy wild and wandering eyes ?
Know'st thou to whom and where thou play'st the raver ?
I, Aldabella, whom the amorous homage
Of rival lords and princes stirs no more,
Than the light passing of the common air—
I, Aldabella, when my voice might make
Thrones render up their stateliest to my service—
Stoop to the sordid sweepings of a prison ?
I—

BIANCA.

Proud-lipp'd woman, earth's most gorgeous sovereigns

Were worthless of my Fazio ! Foolish woman,
Thou cast'st a jewel off ! The proudest lord
That ever revell'd in thy unchaste arms,
Was a swarth galley-slave to Fazio.
Ah me ! me ! me ! e'en I his lawful wife
Know't not more truly, certainly than thou.—
Hadst thou lov'd him, I had pardon'd, pitied thee :
We two had sate, all coldly, palely sad ;
Dropping, like statues on a fountain side,
A pure, a silent, and eternal dew.
Hadst thou outwept me, I had loved thee for't—
And that were easy, for I'm stony here. (*Putting her hand
to her eyes.*)

ALDABELLA.

Ho there ! to th' hospital for the lunatics
Fetch succour for this poor distrest—

BIANCA.

What said I ?

Oh pardon me, I came not to upbraid thee.—
Think, think—I'll whisper it, I'll not betray thee ;
The air's a tell-tale, and the walls are listeners :—
Think what a change ! Last night within thy chamber ;
(I'll not say in thy arms ; for that displeases thee,

And sickens me to utter,) and to night
Upon a prison pallet, straw, hard straw ;
For eastern perfumes, the rank noisome air ;
For gentle harpings, shrilly clanking chains :—
Nay, turn not off: the worst is yet to come.
To-morrow at his waking, for thy face
Languidly, lovingly down drooping o'er him,
The scarr'd and haggard executioner.

ALDABELLA (*turning away*).

There is a dizzy trembling in mine eye ;
But I must dry the foolish dew for shame.
Well, what is it to me? I slew him not ;
Nay, nor denounced him to the judgment seat.
I but debase myself to lend free hearing
To such coarse fancies.—I must hence: to-night
I feast the lords of Florence.

[*Exit.*

BIANCA.

They're all lies :
Things done within some far and distant planet,
Or offscum of some dreamy poet's brain,
All tales of human goodness. Or they're legends
Left us of some good old forgotten time,
Ere harlotry became a queenly sin,

And housed in palaces. Oh, earth's so crowded
With Vice, that if strange Virtue stray abroad,
They hoot it from them like a thing accurst.
Fazio, my Fazio!—but we'll laugh at them :
We will not stay upon their wicked soil,
E'en though they sue us, not to die and leave them.

SCENE IV.—*Fazio's House.*

BIANCA.

Aye, what a fierce and frantic coil is here,
Because the sun must shine on one man less !
I'm sick and weary — my feet drag along.
Why must I trail, like a scotch'd serpent, hither ?
Here, to this house, where all things breathe of Fazio ?
The air tastes of him—the walls whisper of him.—
Oh, I'll to bed! to bed!——What find I there ?
Fazio, my fond, my gentle, fervent Fazio ?—
No!——Cold stones are his couch, harsh iron bars
Curtain his slumbers.—Oh, no, no—I have it—
He is in Aldabella's arms.—Out on't !
Fie, fie!—that's rank, that's noisome!——I remember—
Our children—aye, my children—Fazio's children.
'Twas my thoughts' burthen as I came along,

Were it not wise to bear them off with us
Away from this cold world?—Why should we breed up
More sinners for the Devil to prey upon?
There's one a boy—some strumpet will enlace him,
And make him wear her loathsome livery.
The other a girl: if she be ill, she'll sink
Spotted to death—she'll be an Aldabella:
If she be chaste, she'll be a wretch like me,
A jealous wretch, a frantic guilty wretch.—
No, no: they must not live, they must not live!

[Exit into a chamber.]

After a pause she returns.

It will not be, it will not be—they woke
As though e'en in their sleep they felt my presence;
And then they smiled upon me fondly, playfully,
And stretch'd their rosy fingers to sport with me:
The boy did arch his eyebrows so like Fazio,
Though my soul wish'd that God would take them to him,
That they were scaped this miserable world,
I could but kiss them; and, when I had kiss'd them,
I could as soon have leap'd up to the moon
As speck'd or soil'd their alabaster skins.—
Wild that I am!—Take them t' another world!—

As though I, I my husband's murderess,
In the dread separation of the dead,
Should meet again those spotless innocents! —
Oh, happy they! — they will but know to-morrow
By the renewal of the soft warm daylight. [Exit.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A Street—Morning twilight.*

BIANCA.

Where have I been?—I have not been at rest—
There's yet the stir of motion in my limbs.
Oh, I remember—'twas a hideous strife
Within my brain : I felt that all was hopeless,
Yet would not credit it; and I set forth
To tell my Fazio so, and dared not front him
With such cold comfort. Then a mist came o'er me,
And something drove me on, and on, and on,
Street after street, each blacker than the other,
And a blue axe did skimmer through the gloom—
Its fiery edge did waver to and fro—
And there were infants' voices, faint and failing,
That panted after me. I knew I fled them;
Yet could not choose but fly. And then, oh then,
I gazed and gazed upon the starless darkness,
And blest it in my soul, for it was deeply
And beautifully black—no speck of light;

And I had feverish and fantastic hopes,
 That it would last for ever, nor give place
 To th' horrible to-morrow.——Ha, 'tis there!—
 'Tis the grey morning light aches in mine eyes—
 It is that morrow!——Ho!—Look out, look out!
 With what a hateful and unwonted swiftness
 It scares my comfortable darkness from me!——
 Fool that I am!—I've lost the few brief hours
 Yet left me of my Fazio!—Oh, away,
 Away to him!—away! [Exit.

SCENE II.—*The Prison—totally dark, except a lamp.*

FAZIO and PHILARIO.

FAZIO.

I thank thee : 'twas a melancholy hymn;
 But soft and soothing as the gale of eve,
 The gale, whose flower-sweet breath no more shall pass
 o'er me.

Oh, what a gentle ministrant is music
 To piety—to mild, to penitent piety!
 Oh, it gives plumage to the tardy prayer,
 That lingers in our lazy earthly air,
 And melts with it to heaven.——To die, 'tis dreary;

To die a villain's death, that's yet a pang.
But it must down : I have so steep'd my soul
In the bitter ashes of true penitence,
That they have put on a delicious savour,
And all is halcyon quiet, all within.
Bianca !—Where is she ?—why comes she not ?——
Yet I do almost wish her not to come,
Lest she again enamour me of life.

PHILARIO.

Hast thou no charge to her, no fond bequest ?—
It shall lose little by my bearing it.

FAZIO.

Oh yes, oh yes !—I have her picture here :
That I had seen it in one hour of my life,
In Aldabella's arms had it look'd on me,
I should have had one sin less to repent of.
I'm loth the coarse and vulgar executioner
Should handle it with his foul gripe, or pass
His ribald jests upon it.—Give it her.

*[With the picture he draws out some gold, on which he looks
with great apparent melancholy.]*

PHILARIO.

And this too, sir ?

FAZIO.

Oh, touch it not, Philario!

Oh, touch it not!—'tis venomous, 'tis viperous!

If there be bottomless sea, unfathom'd pit

In earth's black womb—oh, plunge it, plunge it deep,

Deep, dark! or if a devil be abroad,

Give it to him, to bear it whence it came,

To its own native Hell.—Oh no, no, no!—

He must not have it: for with it he'll betray

More men, more noble spirits than Lucifer

Drew down from heaven. This yellow pestilence

Laid waste my Eden; made a gaudy bird of me,

For soft Temptation's silken nets to snare.

It crept in to us—Sin came with it—Misery

Dogg'd its foul footsteps—ever-deepening Sin,

And ever-darkening Misery. —Philario,

Away with it!—away!—(*Takes the picture*) Here's fairer

gazing.

Thou would'st not think these smooth and smiling lips

Could speak away a life—a husband's life.

Yet ah! I led the way to sin—I wrong'd her:

Yet, Heaven be witness, though I wrong'd her, lov'd her,

E'en in my heart of heart. (*Enter BIANCA.*)

BIANCA.

Who's that, Bianca,
That's loved so deeply? —Fazio, Fazio, Fazio—
It is that morrow!—

FAZIO.

Nay, look cheeringly:
It may be God doth punish in this world
To spare hereafter.

BIANCA.

Fazio, set me loose!—
Thou clasp'st thy murderess.

FAZIO.

No, it is my love,
My wife, my children's mother!—Pardon me,
Bianca; but thy children—I'll not see them:
For on the wax of a soft infant's memory
Things horrible sink deep and sternly settle.
I would not have them, in their after-days,
Cherish the image of their wretched father
In the cold darkness of a prison-house.
Oh, if they ask thee of their father, tell them
That he is dead, but say not how.

BIANCA.

No, no—

Not tell them, that their mother murder'd him.

FAZIO.

But are they well, my love?

BIANCA.

What, had I freed them
From this drear villains' earth, sent them before us,
Lest we should miss them in another world,
And so be fetter'd by a cold regret
Of this sad sunshine?

FAZIO.

Oh, thou hast not been
So wild a rebel to the will of God!—
If that thou hast, 'twill make my passionate arms,
That ring thee round so fondly, drop off from thee,
Like sere and wither'd ivy; make my farewell
Spoken in such suffocate and distemper'd tone,
'Twill sound more like——

BIANCA.

They live! thank God, they live!

I should not rack thee with such fantasies:

But there have been such hideous things around me,

Some whispering me, some dragging me ; I've felt
Not half a moment's calm since last we parted,
So exquisite, so gentle, as this now—
I could sleep on thy bosom, Fazio.

Enter ANTONIO.

Prisoner,
Thine hour is come.

BIANCA.

It is not morning yet—
Where is the twilight that should usher it ?
Where is the sun, that should come golden on ?
Ill-favour'd liar, to come prate of morning,
With torchlight in thy hand to scare the darkness.

ANTONIO.

Thou dost forget ; day's light ne'er pierceth here :
The sun hath kindled up the open air.

BIANCA.

I say, 'tis but an hour since it was evening,
A dreary, measureless, and mournful hour,
Yet but an hour.

FAZIO.

I will obey thee, officer !
Yet but a word—Bianca, 'tis a strange one—

Canst thou endure it, dearest?—Aldabella——

BIANCA.

Curse her!

FAZIO.

Peace, peace!—'tis dangerous: sinners' curses
Pluck them down tenfold from the angry heavens
Upon the curser's head—Beseech thee, peace!—
Forgive her—for thy Fazio's sake, forgive her.

BIANCA.

Anything not to think on her——Not yet—
They shall not kill thee—by my faith they shall not!
I'll clasp mine arms so closely round thy neck,
That the red axe shall hew them off, ere shred
A hair of thee: I will so mingle with thee,
That they shall strike at random, and perchance
Set me free first——

[The bell sounds, her grasp relaxes, and she stands torpid.]

FAZIO (*kissing her, which she does not seem to be conscious of*).

Farewel, farewell, farewell!—

She does not feel, she does not feel!—Thank Heaven,
She does not feel her Fazio's last, last kiss!—
One other!—Cold as stone—sweet, sweet as roses. *[Exit.]*

BIANCA (*slowly recovering*).

Gone, gone!—he is not air yet, not thin spirit!—

He should not glide away—he is not guilty——

Ye murder and not execute—Not guilty.

[*Exit, followed by Philario.*]

SCENE III.—*A magnificent Apartment in the Palace of AL-*

DABELLA—*Every appearance of a ball prolonged till morning*—DUKE, LORDS, FALSETTO, DANDOLO, and AL-DABELLA.

DUKE.

'Tis late, 'tis late; the yellow morning light

Streams in upon our sick and waning lamps.

It was a jocund night: but good my friends,

The sun reproves our lingering revelry;

And, angry at our scorning of his state,

Will shine the slumber from our heavy eyes.

GONSALVO.

There's one, my liege, will sleep more calm than we:

But now I heard the bell with iron tongue

Speak out unto the still and solemn air

The death-stroke of the murderer Fazio.

DUKE.

So, lady, fare thee well : our gentlest thanks
For thy fair entertaining.—Ha! what's here?

Enter BIANCA, followed by PHILARIO.

BIANCA.

Ha! ye've been dancing, dancing—so have I :
But mine was heavy music, slow and solemn—
A bell, a bell : my thick blood roll'd to it,
My heart swung to and fro, a dull deep motion.

(Seeing ALDABELLA.)

'Tis thou, 'tis thou!—I came to tell thee something!

ALDABELLA (alarmed and shrieking).

Aye me! aye me!

BIANCA.

Nay, shrink not—I'll not kill thee :
For if I do, I know, in the other world,
Thou'lt shoot between me and my richest joys.—
Thou shalt stay here—I'll have him there—all—all of him.

DUKE.

What means the wild-hair'd maniac?

BIANCA (moving him aside).

Bye and bye——

To ALDABELLA.

I tell thee, that warm cheek thy lips did stray on
But yesternight, 'tis cold and colourless :
The breath, that stirr'd among thy golden locks,
That was such incense to thee—it is fled :
The voice, that call'd thee then, his soul of soul—
I know it—'twas his favourite phrase of love—
I've heard it many a time myself—'twas luscious ;
That mild, that musical voice is dumb and frozen :
The neck whereon thine arms did hang so tenderly,
There's blood upon it, blood—I tell thee, blood.
Dost thou hear that ? is thy brain fire to hear it ?
Mine is, mine is, mine is.

DUKE.

'Tis Fazio's wife.

BIANCA.

It is not Fazio's wife.—Have the dead wives ?
Aye, aye, my liege, and I know thee, and well—
Thou art the rich-robed minister of the laws.
Fine laws ! rare laws ! most equitable laws !
Who robs his neighbour of his yellow dust,
Or his bright sparkling stones, or such gay trash—

Oh, he must die, die for the public good.
 And if one steal a husband from his wife,
 Do dive into her heart for its best treasure,
 Do rend asunder whom Heaven link'd in one—
 Oh, they are meek, and merciful, and milky—
 'Tis a trick of human frailty——Oh, fine laws !
 Rare laws ! most equitable laws !

DUKE.

Poor wretch,

Who is it thus hath wrong'd thee ?

BIANCA (*to the DUKE*).

Come thou here.

The others crowd around her—she says to FALSETTO,
 Get back, get back : the god that thou adoredst,
 Thy god is dead, thou pitiful idolater.

To DANDOLO (shewing her Dress).

I know they're coarse and tatter'd—Get thee back.

To the DUKE.

I tell thee, that rich woman—she——My liege,
 I'll speak anon—my lips do cling together—
 There's dust about my tongue—I cannot move it.

DUKE.

Ho, there !—some wine !

BIANCA.

Thank thee, 'tis moist—I thank thee !

(As she raises the goblet to her lips, she sees ALDABELLA, and dashes it away.)

Her lips have been upon it—I'll have none on't.

ALDABELLA.

My liege, thou wilt not hearken to the tale
Of a mad woman, venting her sick fancies
Upon a lady of my state and honour !

DUKE.

Lady, there is one state alone, that holds
Above the range of plumed and restless Justice
Her throned majesty—the state of Virtue.—
Poor sad distraught, speak on.

BIANCA.

I am not mad,
Thou smooth-lipp'd slanderer !—I have been mad,
And then my words came vague, and loose, and broken ;
But now, there's mode and measure in my speech.
I'll hold my brain ; and then I'll tell my tale
Simply and clearly.—Fazio, my poor Fazio—
He murder'd not—he found Bartolo dead.
The wealth did shine in his eyes, and he was dazzled.

And when that he was gaily gilded up,
 She, she, I say, (nay, keep away from her,
 For she hath witchcraft all around her,) she
 Did take him to her chamber——Fie, my liege!
 What should my husband in her chamber?—Then,
 Aye then, I madden'd.——Hark! hark! hark!—the bell,
 The bell that I set knolling—hark!—Here, here,
 Massy and cold it strikes—Here, here. (*Clasping her forehead.*)

GONSALVO.

Sad woman!

Tear not so piteously thy disorder'd hair!

BIANCA.

I do not tear my hair: there should be pain
 If that I did; but all my pain's within (*with her hand to her
 bosom*).

It will not break, it will not break—'tis iron.

DUKE.

If this be true——

PHILARIO.

My liege, it is the tale
 That Fazio told me ere he died.

BIANCA.

Aye, sir,

The dying lie not—he, a dying man,
Lied not—and I, a dying woman, lie not :
For I shall die, spite of this iron here.

DUKE to ALDABELLA.

There is confession in thy guilty cheeks.
Thou high-born baseness ! beautiful deformity !
Dishonour'd honour !—How hast thou discredited
All that doth fetter admiration's eye,
And made us out of love with loveliness !
I do condemn thee, woman, by the warrant
Of this my ducal diadem, to put on thee
The rigid convent vows : there bleach anew
Thy sullied breast ; there temper thy rank blood ;
Lay ashes to thy soul ; swathe thy hot skin
In sackcloth ; and God give thee length of days,
T' atone, by this world's misery, this world's sin.

[Exit ALDABELLA.

BIANCA.

Bless thee, Heaven bless thee !—Yet it must not be.
My Fazio said we must forgive her—Fazio
Said so ; and all he said is best and wisest.

DUKE.

She shall have her desert : ought more to ask of us ?

BIANCA.

My children—thou'lt protect them——Oh, my liege,
Make them not rich : let them be poor and honest.

DUKE.

I will, I will.

BIANCA.

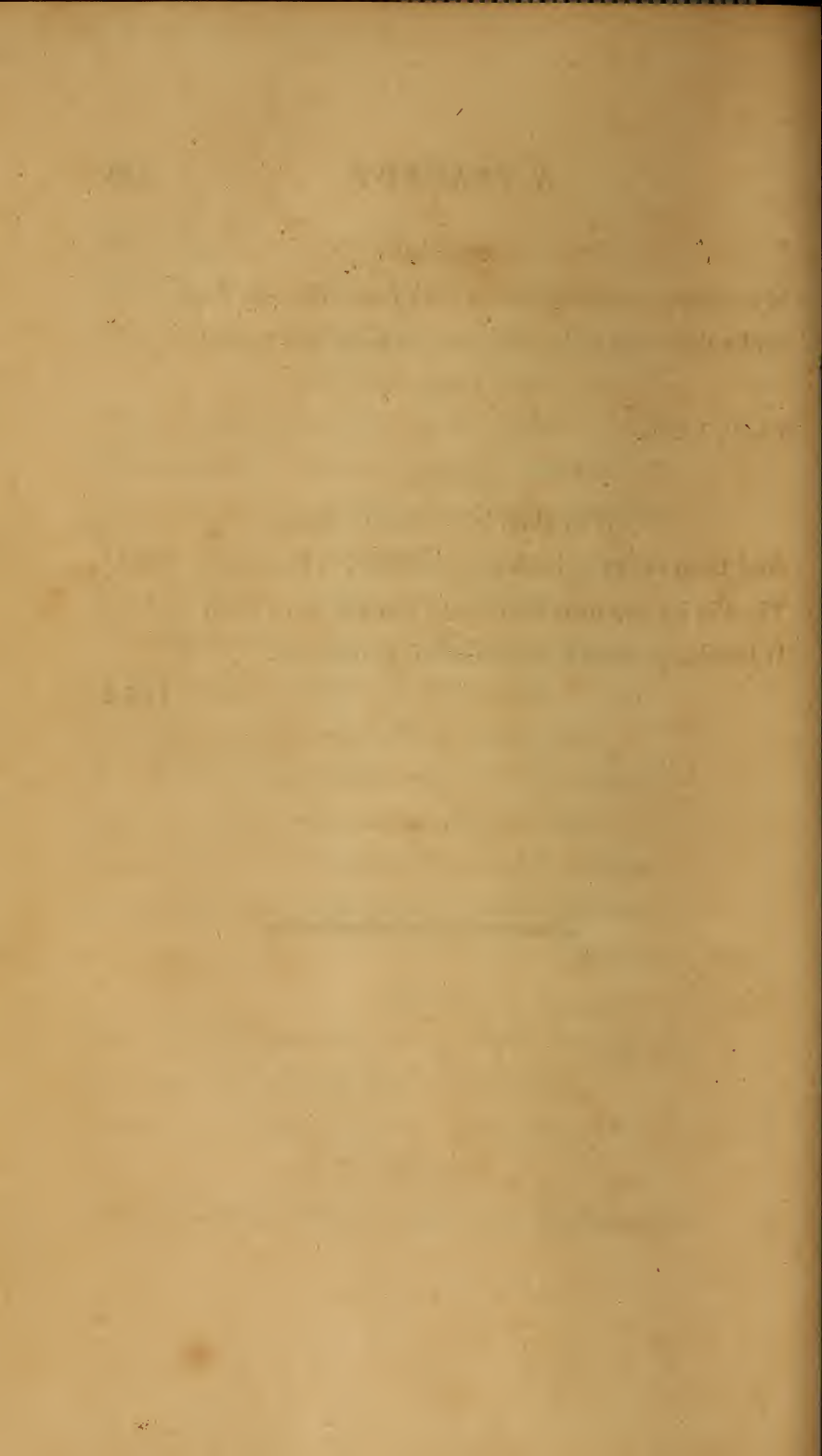
Why then 'tis time, 'tis time.

And thou believ'st he is no murderer? (*Duke bows assent.*)

Thou'lt lay me near him, and keep her away from us.

It breaks, it breaks, it breaks—it is not iron.

[*Dies.*]



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